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Toward a University of the First Rank

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Toward A University Of the First Rank

“... no burden too heavy ...”

On the 30th of June of this year I concluded my third year as your President. During the three years that I have served you in this capacity, I have enjoyed extraordinary support and encouragement from the Board of Trustees, from members of the faculty and the administrative staff, from the student leadership, the student body as a whole, from the alumni, and from countless thousands of individuals who love this University because they appreciate what it represents and are concerned about its future development.

As I undertake my fourth year, I express to all of you and to all of them my deepest gratitude and profound appreciation for having so willingly joined in extending a supporting hand in helping me to discharge a task that has sometimes been awesome in its scope and complex in its execution. What has been accomplished at Howard so far during this short period could not have been accomplished without your aid. And what will be accomplished in the months and years to come, will require that continued support, that continued interest, and that continued encouragement that have characterized the last three years.

We begin this new academic year deeply concerned about the state of our society, the state of our world, the state of our peoples' century-long struggle, and the state of this University, which has been so much to so many. But despite our concern, we begin this new academic year mindful of our longevity as an institution of higher learning, mindful of our proven ability to succeed in the face of formidable opposition, mindful of our capacity to produce on a measure unmatched by any other university of comparable resources, and clearly convinced of our capability to survive in the face of unusual pressures and, sometimes, deliberate efforts to destroy us.

Howard University, let us not forget, today stands as a living symbol and a vivid expression of indomitable courage, of a radical and audacious faith, of an unrecruited dedication and devotion, and

the unswerving will and determination of a people to throw off the yokes of bondage in order that the oppressed may go free and to achieve for themselves and for their posterity, the fruits and joys of life, of liberty, of happiness, and of security.

This institution, we are reminded, was established and guided by men who walked where they could not always see, who acted on the basis of what was fundamentally and morally right as opposed to what was transient, political expediency, and who believed in the very depths of their being that education was indispensable to the creation and preservation of a free society.

Today we reaffirm anew what they have passed on to us as our legacy. In our time, we too, will walk where we cannot always see. We shall be governed in every decision that we make by what is fundamentally and morally right and not by what is politically expedient. And we shall labor without ceasing to provide that kind of education that will result in a truly liberated individual, a truly free nation, and a truly open society.

In fidelity to the example of those who have preceded us, we affirm again that there is no burden too heavy for us to bear; there are no hardships we are unwilling to endure; there are no obstacles we are not determined to overcome; and there is no distance we are unwilling to travel to ensure that this University shall forever stand as an eternal refutation of the belief that some men, by nature, or by race, or by skin color, are inherently, intrinsically and generically superior, and that the lives and destinies and fortunes of some men must be dominated, controlled, and directed by other men.

We say to our friends and also to our foes that while our Charter as a university was granted by an Act of Congress, the mission and purpose of this University in this world is guided by the hand of God. The mission on which we are embarked has its foundation in the ancient quest of man for freedom and in the modern hope of man for justice.

4 To be free is to be unrestricted and unrestrained in the exercise of one's right to self-expression, self-determination, self-preservation, and self-survival without endangering or intruding upon the rights and freedoms of others.

And to enjoy justice is to be accorded equity and parity with all men, and in the process, to be accorded access to all of the opportunities, rewards, benefits, and powers of this society; and not as a matter of privilege, but rather as a matter of right.

I regard this University, therefore, as something more than an ordinary institution of higher learning. For all of us it is a charge to keep, a purpose to fulfill, a goal to pursue, and a legacy to preserve.

It is our solemn intention by both our public pronouncements, as an institution, and by our private performance, as individuals, to try to destroy the myth and dogma of race and racism.

“Education represents . . . important . . . effective instrument of liberation . . .”

It has always been my conviction, and it remains so now, that the great moral issue of our time is, in fact, the issue of race and racism, and its concomitant issues of oppression and disadvantage, and the issue of isolation and exclusion. We shall not resolve the issue of race in America or destroy racism in American institutions by pretending or presuming that they will be resolved by time, or that they will be removed or abolished by wishful thinking and pious hope.

The conflict between black and white in America and the continued oppression of Black men by both institutions and systems, threaten the very survival of this Republic and greatly endanger the peace of the world. I say that if this nation is truly committed to achieving and preserving a generation of world peace, then this nation also must be committed to creating and preserving among its own citizens that liberty, that justice, and that fraternity

that can stand as an example for the rest of the world.

We cannot claim to be the bulwark of democracy abroad unless we can become the citadel of democracy at home. And we cannot lead the nations of the world to freedom unless America can lead the American people to freedom. We cannot export to foreign shores what we do not already possess in our own society

In the almost ten years that I have served as a college or university president, there has been nothing in my experience to alter that conviction, and, indeed all of my experiences have served simply to confirm and reinforce it. But after two decades of determined and concerted effort on the part of men and women, both black and white, of daring, of courage, and of fundamental integrity to remove and eliminate race and racism from American life, we are now beginning to witness the emergence of signs buttressed by reports and studies from sectors of higher education, or from those bearing the credentials of scholars, that would contribute to a deepening of the racial crisis and the further entrenchment of racism and racial oppression.

There is, for example, the celebrated Moynihan memorandum—the Moynihan thesis that we have made so much progress in improving the state and status of Black Americans that the country should and could afford to treat these issues and their attendant problems with “benign neglect.”

There is the Jensen thesis that scientific proof is now available that intelligence is indissolubly connected with race and that Blacks, for racial and genetic reasons, are inherently inferior. And, of course, the more recent report of Christopher Jencks and colleagues, soon to be published, affirming that the education of an individual has limited or no impact on one's social, personal, and intellectual development. And that higher education contributes little or nothing to an individual's, or a group's, social mobility and economic status. These are just

a few examples of the so-called scholarly studies of the kind I have in mind.

Studies and reports of this type have a profound influence in shaping American public opinion and in molding American public policy. At the very time in our national history when there is a clear and unequivocal moral imperative to pursue the ends of social justice, with vigor and commitment, there are ominous signs of movement in the opposite direction supported by the scholarly community.

For us who labor here in this University in the service of Howard, on behalf of our people and in the interest of our country, let us understand clearly that we cannot afford to be silent on these issues, nor can we allow studies and reports such as these to go un rebutted and unrefuted. We have the capability here to also engage in social science and hard science research. With young people already grossly under-represented in American higher education, and with many Black colleges facing ever-increasing prospects of less support in the future than they have had in the past, there is the very real danger that during this crucial decade Black Americans may be afforded less educational opportunity of high quality rather than more.

“Our University's reach must . . . exceed its grasp.”

It is against this backdrop that this institution begins its new year. And it is indeed painful to realize that the very crucible by which we were born, remains after 105 years, the very same crucible by which we are compelled to continue: The severe test of educating our people in order that they may be free, and in influencing a society in order that it may become just. We face no easier task in this endeavor in 1972 than did our forebearers or our founders in 1867.

When the Congress of the United States on December 13, 1928, amended the Charter of the University to authorize annual federal appropriations for the construction, development, improvement and

*Books are voices
from past ages
Records of the present
Heralds of the future
Torches to the
unenlightened
Common bond of
cultured men
Trusted friends
Developing the mind
Restoring the spirit
Enter thou into
this company
and seek truth.*

6 maintenance of Howard, the following justification was given:

"Apart from the precedent established by forty-nine years of Congressional action, the Committee feels that federal aid to Howard is fully justified by the national importance of the race problem. For many years it has been felt that the American people owed an obligation to the Indian, whom they dispossessed of his land and annual appropriations of sizable amounts have been passed by Congress in fulfillment of this obligation. The obligation in favor of the Negro race would seem to be even stronger than in the case of the Indian. The Negro was not robbed of his land as was the Indian, but was seized by force and brought unwillingly to a strange country, where for generations he was a slave of a white man and where as a race he has since been compelled to eke out a meager and precarious existence."

These were the words of the United States Congress almost forty-four years ago. The justification for the federal support of this University and the premise upon which the program was launched, were unequivocal; namely, that in view of the inequitable opportunities afforded Black Americans, the Federal Government felt and expressed a moral and social obligation to help compensate for this deficiency by developing this institution into a "*university of the first rank*."

Upon my entrance into office as President on July 1, 1969, I was concerned to determine the extent to which this promise had been kept and this commitment had been fulfilled. I now must speak to you honestly and candidly about the state of our institution, and I will limit my remaining remarks to a discussion of our resources.

To paraphrase the late John F. Kennedy in his first State of the Union address: "To state the facts frankly is not to despair the future nor indict the past. The prudent

heir takes careful inventory of his legacies and gives a faithful accounting to those whom he owes an obligation of trust. And while the occasion does not call for another recital of our blessings and our assets, we have no greater asset than the willingness of a determined people through its leaders to face all problems frankly and to meet all challenges, free from panic or fear and with great confidence."

The poet Browning wrote that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for." What Browning said of man is also true of universities. And this year, our University's reach must clearly exceed its grasp. And we must take bold and courageous steps to bring to fulfillment the commitment of the Federal Government to help and maintain this institution as a "university of the first rank."

"Today . . . we are a neglected . . . deprived institution . . ."

There are several measures by which it is determined whether an institution can be considered among those of the "first rank." Clearly on the basis of what Howard has contributed and on the basis of what it has achieved, it stands as a university of more than the first magnitude. But in the area of the adequacy of our resources—the measures that have become normative in higher education—one is compelled by the facts to render a different verdict.

Historically, institutions serving primarily Black Americans have been literally forced "to make brick without straw." What was possible in the past is clearly no longer possible now and will certainly not be possible or desirable in the future. Our spiritual resources are boundless, but our material resources are so severely restricted as to impose upon us a burden shared by no other major university in this land.

Today we must acknowledge that we are a neglected and deprived institution and such neglect and deprivation have

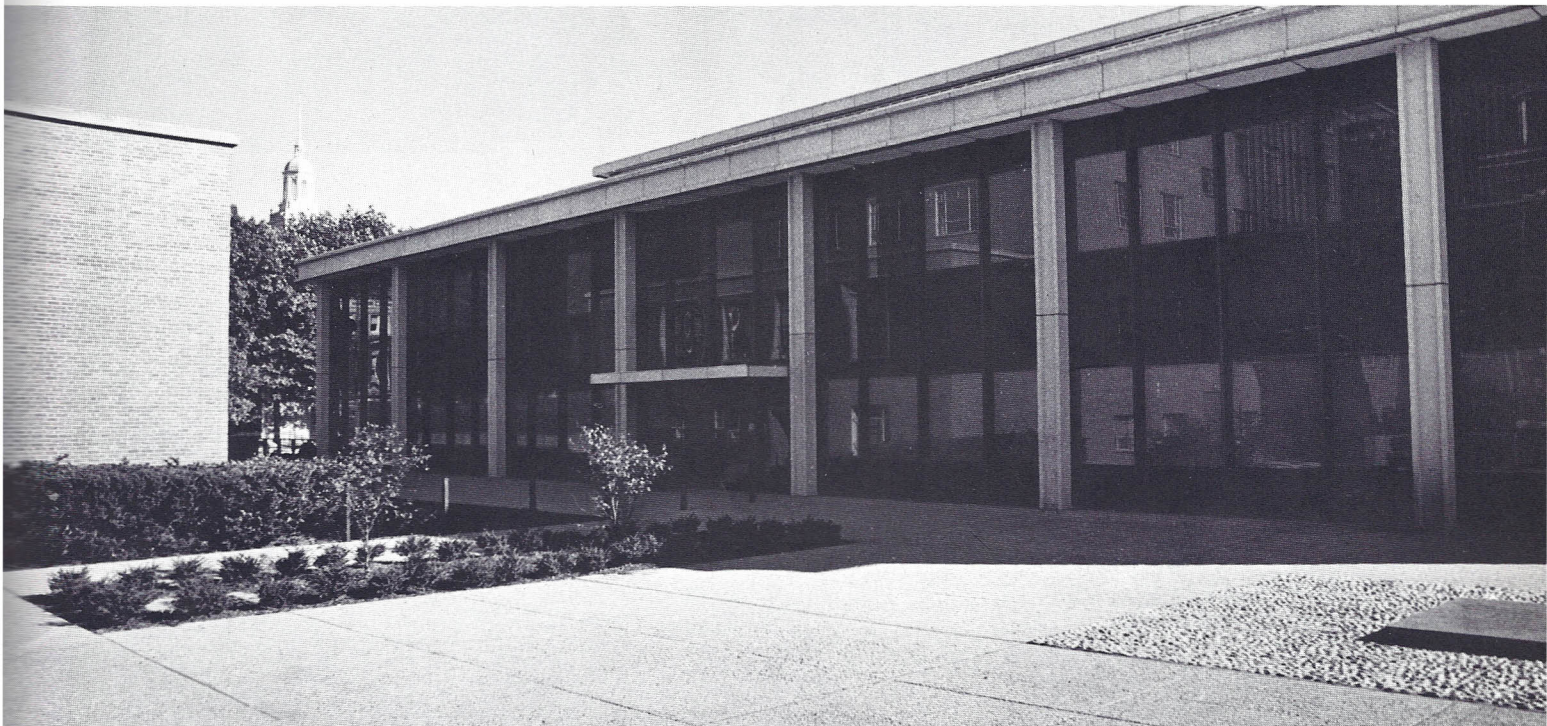
been a lingering legacy in our total historical experience.

In a nation such as America, I am not prepared to exalt deprivation and poverty to the level of *minor virtues* to be worshipped simply because they have been the enduring experience of Black Americans. And, at the same time, I do not accept the view that adequacy of resources and economic sufficiency are *major vices* to be rejected in the name of some higher value. It is my position that Black educators must be *materialistically minded* without being *mindlessly materialistic* and reject the concept of bargain basement education for our students.

In order to determine where we now stand, as one means of assessing where we have to go, I have just concluded an extensive study which compares analytically the resources of this institution with those of eleven other universities that are similar to Howard in enrollment, curricula offerings, institutional complexity and academic function. These 11 institutions differ from Howard in only one material respect: their student bodies are predominantly white, and ours is predominantly Black.

I need not take the time now to review all of our findings, but it is important that you have some insight into our relative standing as disclosed by this study. In order for us to be simply at the level of the average based on the data for 1969-70, we needed the following in critical resource areas:

- For our current overall operating budget we needed \$44.5 million more than we had at our disposal.
- In sponsored research, just to be at the average, we needed an additional \$18.1 million.
- In the area of student financial aid, an area of great concern to all of us, and an area in which none of the other institutions had a problem as severe as ours, we were deficient by \$3.4 million.
- In total library expenditures, we needed an additional \$1.6 million, and to have just an average library collec-



tion for a university of our kind, we needed an additional 1.4 million volumes in our library.

- In the value of our physical plant, we needed an additional investment of more than \$60 million.
- In total full-time faculty, we required an addition of almost 400 more teachers.
- The average faculty-student ratio for these eleven universities was 1:9, and Howard's faculty-student ratio was in excess of 1:15.

In terms of simple addition, Howard University needed \$127.6 million more than we had, 400 more teachers and almost 1½ million more library books, just to catch up with universities that are just like us.

And I must tell you that all of these eleven universities received relatively substantial federal support, with five of them receiving federal support far in excess of that received by Howard. The only substantive area in which Howard exceeded the average of the median was

in the area of student enrollment. It should be clear to anyone, who is honest, why we have requested from the Federal Government increases to our budget at levels regarded by many—as suggesting that I am out of my mind! In 1970-71 we asked for a budget increase of \$13,000,000, and we received \$2.5 million; in 1971-72 we sought an increase of \$24,000,000, and received \$6 million; in 1972-73 we requested an increase of \$37 million, and we have pending before the Congress an increase of \$9 million; but for 1973-74 we have filed a request for a total increase in excess of \$80 million.

A year ago, *Fortune* magazine reported that Yale University, which had an enrollment of 9,300 students, had an operating budget of \$125 million. Howard, that same year, had an enrollment of 9,600 students, and an operating budget of only \$55 million. Yale, which had less students than Howard, but is primarily white, had two and one-half times as much in resources as did Howard which is predom-

inantly Black. And Black Howard, my friends, and white Yale are expected to provide equally outstanding education, with Howard having less than half the resources of Yale. *IT SIMPLY CANNOT BE DONE!* Money does not guarantee quality education, but, I am a firm believer that quality education cannot be provided without adequate and sufficient resources.

For the three years on which federal action on our budget has already been taken, the amount of increases approved by the Administration and appropriated by the Congress have nowhere approximated the level of increases we have placed before them. In the light of our needs and in view of our deficiencies, I myself regard these requests as modest, representing the minimum additional resources required for Howard simply to catch up. And the realism of our situation is further highlighted by the fact that for this current academic year I received on my desk from the Deans, Program Directors, and Vice Presidents requests for

budget increases totaling \$22 million. I had at my disposal only \$900,000 in additional money.

Now, despite the initials of my name, I make no claim to being Jesus Christ. And unlike his miracle with the five loaves and the five fishes, I could find no way to stretch \$900,000 to cover \$22 million in unmet needs.

“If we would be liberated . . . we must use . . . the instrument of the mind.”

8 I regard our financial situation, therefore, as serious, requiring the most serious attention of our Board of Trustees, of your President and of our administrative staff. I do not expect the Federal Government to meet totally all of our needs but I do expect others to join in. I do expect the Federal Government to keep its commitment to help make this University a “university of the first rank.” Toward this end, we are now preparing to launch a ten-year, nationwide, development, fundraising program designed to produce from all of these sources the level of investment that will be required to enable us to discharge our responsibilities to our students, to meet the needs of our faculty and our staff, and to better serve the larger society that depends upon us to be able to fully respond to their needs.

This year we shall again go to the Executive Branch of the Government and to the Congress and begin to present our case to American philanthropy, individuals, foundations, corporations and our alumni, and lay before them the facts that added up to a history of neglect and deprivation that borders on the criminal. We shall show them a proven record of accomplishment and achievement over a period of more than a century. And we shall appeal to their sense of equity and justice, to the magnanimity of their spirit, to their enlightened self-interest, and make our case on the basis of the national interest.

I have tried to share with you some of my concerns about developments in the larger society that affect our work and have an impact on our life as an academic institution. I have also tried to lay before you, in an abbreviated form, the nature and extent of our resources and our deficiencies in order that you might better understand some of the hardships under which we must labor and some of the handicaps under which all of us must try to serve.

It has been evident to me for a long time that what American Blacks need more desperately than anything, and what the





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American society needs more desperately than anything is: thoroughly educated, skillfully trained, and deeply committed Black leadership.

We commit Howard University to being the foremost institution in the land to provide that leadership. And in so doing, we are simply re-affirming what Howard has already done through the course of its 105 years.

It is not a new commitment. But it does require an altogether different perception and definition of the problem to be attacked and of the solution to be used.

Black Americans and this university community must value *excellence* and *quality* more than we have ever in the past. In our determination to celebrate and affirm the Black presence as an integral, legitimate, and unavoidable expression of the American presence in the world, we must be equally determined to make being Black synonymous with being excellent, to endow that which is black with an unmatched quality, and to express a dedication and a devotion that will be the envy of all men everywhere.

In no way can we allow "blackness" to become the new name of the game for rapping rhetoric; for being slick, rather than for being informed and capable; for being devious, rather than for being devoted; for conniving and scheming, rather than for being shrewd and skilled. Black is indeed beautiful and not ugly; it is clearly equal and not inferior. There is, for certain, a black past, and there is clearly a black present which we are legitimately entitled to know, understand, appreciate, celebrate and honor. But we must now make the point—for ourselves and for others—that there must also be a black future; a future to be dug from the quarry of our past, and a future to be hewn from the rock of our black present; and a future to be sculptured out of the fashion of our dreams, our hopes and our aspirations to be a free people.

I believe that we shall never become liberated until we have become educated. And my creed is the creed of Epictetus, himself a former slave, who when observing the society of Ancient Greece, wrote: "Man has decided that only free men shall be educated, but God has decreed that only the educated are truly free."

If we would be liberated therefore, we must be educated and those who are educated must be disciplined to use the one instrument that man possesses that differentiates him from the lower animal—the instrument of the mind. The disciplined mind has no competitor. And the use of knowledge and the skill to use it, will make one without a peer.

The 1972-73 academic year will not be an easy year for any of us. It will be a year of hard decisions as we try to formulate an effective strategy for increasing our federal appropriations and as we try to develop a compelling case to justify a response and commitment from the larger American public. At the same time, all of us must be engaged in the serious and committed effort to eliminate at this institution, administrative inefficiencies wherever they exist, beginning in the President's Office.

"We face . . . new challenges . . . new opportunities."

We must be committed to removing proliferation and duplication of effort; to improving the effectiveness of our teaching and the quality of our learning; to induce in our students, a deep and abiding commitment to serious scholarship and serious study; to rid our community of drugs and those who push them, and those who advocate their use; and to develop among each other a greater confidence and trust, a genuine mutual respect and tolerance for diversity and differences; and a sincere willingness on the part of us all to grasp each other's hand as an expression of simple goodness with true love in our hearts. And let us all this year, and in the years to come, reach far beyond what we think we can grasp and let us take one more step toward the fulfillment of our destiny as a "university of the first rank without equal."

Our new year has begun. We face both new challenges and new opportunities. Let us face the new challenges with courage and conviction, and let us seize the new opportunities with passion and with hope, and by our conjoined and collective efforts, let us turn the tide at this University, and, in the process, help our nation turn the tide for itself also.

Address by President James E. Cheek
At the Fall Convocation Inaugurating
The 105th Academic Year of Howard,
September 14, 1972.